

SPECIFIC FEATURES OF BLAGAJ TEKKE*

Blagaj Tekkesi'nin Belirli Özellikleri

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Abstract

Tekija (tekke, khanqah) is an Islamic institution where dervishes (Sufis) gather, reside, and perform religious rites. The word tekke is of Persian origin. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, tekkes appeared with the advent of Islam in the 15th century. However, some were built before the arrival of the Ottomans, such as the Mevlevi tekke in Bentbaša built by Isa-beg Ishaković in 1461 in Sarajevo. Tekkes were usually the first buildings that were constructed and located at the entrance of the city. Usually, they were built by dervishes, most often sheiks. Besides religious purposes, they also served as resting places or lodgings for casual travelers. There are numerous tekkes throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina from west to east, from north to south. Some of the most famous tekkes in Bosnia and Herzegovina are the tekke at the Buna spring in Blagaj, the Hadži Sinan's tekke, Nadmlini tekke in Sarajevo, tekke in Kaćuni, tekke in Jajce, tekke in Živčići, and others.

Among these, one of the most distinguished tekke in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the one at the Buna spring in the city of Blagaj. The paper aims to elaborate on the most important characteristics and main features of this tekke and other structures within this complex.

Keywords: Tekke, Musafirhana building, Türbe, Blagaj, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Öz

Tekke (tekke, khanqah), dervişlerin (Sufilerin) toplandığı, ikamet ettiği ve dini ayinler gerçekleştirdiği İslami bir kurumdur. Tekke kelimesi Farsça kökenlidir. Bosna-Hersek'te tekkeler, 15. yüzyılda İslam'ın gelişimiyle ortaya çıktı. Bununla birlikte, Isa-beg Ishaković tarafından 1461'de Saraybosna'da inşa edilen Bentbaša'daki Mevlevi tekkesi gibi bazıları Osmanlıların geliştinden önce inşa edilmiştir. Tekkeler genellikle ilk inşa edilen ve şehrin girişinde bulunan yapılardır. Genellikle dervişler, çoğunlukla da şeyhler tarafından yaptırılmışlardır. Dini amaçlara ek olarak, ara sıra seyahat edenler için bir dinlenme yeri veya konaklama yeri olarak da hizmet ettiler. Bosna Hersek genelinde batıdan doğuya, kuzeyden güneye çok sayıda tekke bulunmaktadır. Bosna-Hersek'teki en ünlü tekkelerden bazıları Blagaj'daki Buna, Hacı Sinanova tekkesi, Saraybosna'daki Nadmlini tekkesi, Kaćuni'deki tekke, Jajce'deki tekke, Živčići'deki tekke ve diğerleridir.

Bosna Hersek'in en önemli tekkelerinden biri de Buna'nın kaynağındaki Blagaj kasabasındaki tekkedir. Bu çalışma, bu tekke ve bu külliyedeki diğer yapıların en önemli ve karakteristik özelliklerini ele almayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tekke, Musafirhana binası, Türbe, Blagaj, Bosna Hersek.

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1. Introduction

Islamic mysticism, which drew much thought from Neoplatonism and Buddhism, stretched out its branches in all regions with a Muslim population and left deep traces not only in literature but also in the private lives of Muslims. Adherents of that religious-philosophical direction, are called dervishes (Sufis) (Bejtić 1983). There are various orders and suborders of dervishes which appeared and disappeared over time. In the beginning, they performed their rituals in the back rooms of the mosque, which were called *ribâi* in Arabic. Later, special institutions were established for that purpose called tekija (tekke, khanqah) (Bejtić 1983). This is the place where dervishes gather, reside, and perform religious rites. The word *tekke* is of Persian origin. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, tekkes appeared with the advent of Islam in the 15th century. Though, the Mevlevi tekke in Bentbaša was built by Gazi Isa-beg Ishaković already in 1462, which was the first tekke in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bejtić, 1983). Unfortunately, the original building constructed of adobe and wood was not preserved. Evlija Čelebija, who passed through Sarajevo in the middle of the 17th century, stated that there are forty-seven places where dervishes meet in Sarajevo (Bejtić, 1983).

Often these were ordinary residential houses, a private apartment of the dervish elder or sheik, but there were also buildings constructed specially for this purpose. The sizes of tekkes varied from small to large. In the larger *tekkes*, the *semâhâna* was essential, which is the case with tekke in Blagaj. It is a larger room covered with carpets, in which dervishes perform special rituals and a mihrab is carved in the wall for common worship. The building almost regularly houses an apartment for a sheik or an ordinary tekke keeper. In larger tekkes, there is also a *musafirhana*, a special room, which was used for free accommodation for foreign sheiks, ordinary dervishes, and other passengers (Bejtić, 1983).

The first buildings that were constructed and located at the entrance of the city were usually the tekkes. Usually, they were built by dervishes, most often sheiks. Besides for religious purposes they also served as resting places or lodgings for casual travelers.

One of the most withstanding tekkes is at the Buna spring in Blagaj (43.26° N, 17.89° E) (Figure 1), a village-town in the south-eastern region of the Mostar basin in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH). Blagaj was most likely named for its mild weather patterns since “blaga” in Bosnian means “mild”. The Buna spring is the largest karst source in Europe (Vrelo Bune). Next to the spring, there is the famous Sufi tekke, and in its vicinity, there are the prehistoric site of the Green Cave (Figure 2), and a castle from the 15th century (Figure 3). Blagaj stands at the edge of Bišće plain consisting of one of the most valuable mixtures of urban and rural structures in Bosnia and Herzegovina, highly distinguished from other similar structures in its urban layout. Settlements in this region go back to the prehistoric and Roman periods. Blagaj had a key role in the development of Hum in the 10th century, which was close

to an important road that was connected the Adriatic Sea with the Bosnian hinterland through the Neretva Valley. The development of Blagaj continued during the Ottoman Empire. It became a center during four centuries of its existence. The importance of the city was noted in the folk saying “Šeher (major city) Blagaj, *kasaba* (small city) Mostar” (Mujezinović, 2000:1-13). Meaning that at that time Blagaj was considered a major city center with all administrative features while Mostar was a small city. The decline of Blagaj’s importance is related to the development of Mostar, as well as to the formation of the Počitelj Kaza in 1728. Počitelj, for almost one hundred years, was the centre of a *kadiluk* (area under the jurisdiction of a *kadija* or *qadi* - judge).

The Green Cave (Figure 2) has been declared a national monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina in November 2007 according to decision number 05.1-2-135/07-5. It consists of two caves, the Small Cave and the Big Cave. The depth of the Small Cave is on average 7 m, and the width is 10-12 m. The Large Cave consists of a wide front and an elongated, narrow back. Larger and smaller boulders of cave stone cover the surface of the front part, while such cannot be found on the back side. The centrally partitioned stone is located in the middle. It is up to this central stone that the sun’s rays reach. The ceiling covering is very irregular. A regular vault is located at the front, but the ceiling of the back part was formed as a series of small but high notches, created by the water.



Figure 1: Blagaj



Figure 2: Green Cave



Figure 3: Stjepan-grad castle

Above the Green Cave, there is the Stjepangrad-castle (Figure 3), which was built on the top of high karst rock, at an altitude of 310 m above sea level and 266 m above the spring of the Buna River. According to the historical data, this was a territorial unit that was not connected to the settlement of Blagaj. Going back in history, it is the Illyrian tribe Daorsi (Dauersii, Daorsei) that built a fortress. Later, the Romans built a castrum on this site. In the 10th century, on the ruins of the ancient Roman walls, a city developed being the central place of Hum. Stjepan-grad was built on this fortress from late antiquity, above the settlement of Blagaj. It was considered by the noble's Kosača family as one of its most important cities on their estates. Stjepan-grad was the city of Duke Stjepan Vukčić Kosača, after whom it was named. The fortified city was surrounded by ramparts with jagged peaks. A city palace was located within the walls. The entrance of the city was closed by an iron gate.

The Ottomans conquered Blagaj in 1465, and as early as 1473 the Blagaj *kadi* (kadija) is mentioned. It is from this period on that the construction of various buildings around the fortress began, and the structures were located along the two brooks and one river. In 1827, an earthquake hit this area causing severe damage to the foundations so the castle was abandoned in 1835.

2. The Blagaj Tekke

According to the historical data, the Blagaj *tekke* (Figure 4) was presumably built immediately after the establishment of the Ottoman rule in Herzegovina or around 1520. It was built at the site of an earlier Bogomil sanctuary. According to the archeological excavations that were conducted in 2008 it is believed that this was a sanctuary place even during the classic antiquity period, Early Christianity, Middle Ages, and during the Ottoman period (Pašić, 2009a). Additionally, excavations have further shown that the existing *tekke* is only a remnant of the former *tekke* complex, which consists of a series of buildings that were demolished a long time ago (Pašić, 2009a). More information regarding the archeological findings can be found in Pašić (2009a). Unfortunately, there are no written documents that could serve as evidence regarding the exact date of construction. The first written evidence is connected to Čelebija in 1664 (Čelebi, 1996) who traveled through this place. However, as already mentioned, it is believed that this location was of absolute cultural and religious importance much earlier. During its long history, the structure was exposed to various effects. However, the severest devastation was caused by the falling of the rock. It has caused major destruction of the building, followed by its reconstruction. The last major restoration took place around 1850 when the tekke took a baroque appearance which has been preserved to this day.



Figure 4: Panoramic view of Blagaj tekke

The tekke is seen as a type of monastery that has been built by the Dervish. However, it should be mentioned that dervishes stay in the tekke only on certain days of the week and year. According to this, the tekke is by no means identical with a Christian monastery in that sense (Bejtić, 1983). It is on the right side of the Buna River that the tekke was built on the rock, and it is one of the biggest tekkes in Europe. The tekke at Buna Spring in Blagaj near Mostar was first mentioned in the Travelogue of Evlija Čelebija, who traveled through this place in 1664. It is located in the valley under a cliff that stretches over the tekke for 240 meters. As mentioned previously, it is Stjepan Vukčić fort-town (known as Stjepan-grad or Stipan-grad), which stands at the top of the cliff and looks down at the *tekke*. Tekke was heavily damaged several times due to the rock collapse of the cliff and each time it was rebuilt (1716., 1871., 1923., 1949., 1951., 1972. and 2011). The appearance of the *tekke* in 1924 (Čelić, 1953:189-193) and the present view with surrounding structures is presented in Figure 5.



a)



b)

Figure 5: a) Picture was taken in 1924 (Čelić, 1953:189-193) b) Blagaj Tekke and surrounding structures today

The natural-architectural ensemble of Tekke in Blagaj near Mostar has been declared a national monument by the Commission to Preserve National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina in December 2003 according to the Decision no. 06-6-1029/03-8 and according to the Decision on changes and amendments no. 06.2-2-1029/03-48 in May 2006. In the first instance, the assemble of tekke in Blagaj, consisted of a *tekke* with *semâhàna*, *musafirhana* (guest house), *türbe* (tomb), mosque, mills on the river Buna and a few accompanying objects (Pašić, 2009b), together with the natural environment and the springs of River Buna and cliffs.

The urbanization of the Blagaj settlement was on one hand connected to the development of mills, which were used for grinding the grains for the army. On the other hand, the construction of tekkes and musafirhana had an important religious role and the dervishes' activities among the population (Grube et al., 2011:40). By the decision from 2006, the National monument consists of: the tekija (tekke), *türbe*, remains of *musafirhana*, remains of the Ali-paša Rizvanbegović mesdžid (Masjid), mills on the Buna River, as well as the natural surroundings with the springs of River Buna, cave and rocks.

Sufism had a direct impact on the architectural construction of the *tekke* which serves as a place of spiritual contemplation and invocation. Spreading of Sufism and Dervish (Arabic *darwīsh*) was rather fast in Bosnia and Herzegovina and all bigger places had their own tekkes. Special care was taken regarding the place where the tekkes were to be constructed. Buildings were immersed in the natural environment and completely open to it. It is usually a river, a rock, a canyon, and a hill which are denoted as markers of places where *tekkes* are built. The Sufis themselves say that this choice is not done by humans, but by God. According to Hadžimuhamedović (2002:2), the area of Bosnian *tekkes* was initially determined by seven factors: house, staircase, water (calm water and waterfall), rock, spring, grave, and cave. These seven factors are connected to the image of the cosmological order.

The Buna tekke was at first run by the Bektyah Order, and later, in the 18th century, after restoration by Mostar Mufti Zijaudin Ahmed-ibn-Mustafa, and it became a center for gathering of Khalwati (Mujezinović 2000:10). The order takes its name from the Arabic word *khalwa*, meaning "method of withdrawal or isolation from the world for mystical purposes" (Keddie 1972:320). Čelebija states that the Mufti of Mostar built a tekke of the Khalwati order along the cliffs of the Buna spring, in which the dervishes led friendly and scientific discussions. This information probably refers to the Mufti of Mostar, Zijaudin Ahmed-ibn-Mustafa. He was born in Mostar, where he later became a professor and the mufti for about forty years. He distinguished himself as a great connoisseur of Islamic law and wrote several significant works (Mujezinović 2000:10).

On 12 November 2007, the Commission to Preserve National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina nominated the natural and architectural ensemble of Blagaj for inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List in Europe (UNESCO 2009). The

uniqueness of the structures lies in the combination of Ottoman architecture flourished in Mediterranean style (UNESCO, 2009, Decision 2004).

The primary purpose of the *tekke* was to serve as a dervish Zikr praise-chanting (praising God and His names) venue. In some literature, it is known by the name Serdar Ekrem Omer-Pasha tekke (Vakufsko povjerenstvo Mostar 1953-1958).

3. The *Musafirhana* Building And The *Türbe*

The *musafirhana* (guest house) and the *türbe* (a special room where graves are kept) have been preserved until today. The *türbe* has two graves constructed in wood, as shown in Figure 6. Unfortunately, there is no written information about who was buried here. However, the legend states that it is Acik Bas (Muhammad Hindi) (Ayverdi, 1981), who in 1848 became the sheik of this tekke, who rests in this place, and Sari Saltuk Hazretleri (Figure 6b). It is an ongoing debate among historians.



a)



b)

Figure 6 – a) *Türbe*, b) Notice board next to *türbe*

According to a legend, the construction of the *tekke* is connected to Sari Saltuk Hazretleri. A legend states that the *tekke* was erected by Herceg Stjepan as a reward to Saltuk who killed the dragon and thus saved Herceg's daughter who was to be sacrificed. Another legend states that an unknown man appeared in Blagaj and disappeared at the spring of the river Buna, leaving behind a mace and a sword. This was understood as if he was a holy man, the *awliya*. At the place of his disappearance, a *tekke* was erected and his grave was located in the *türbe* (Mujezinović, 2000:10). This person was identified as Sari Saltuk Hazretleri, and among the local population, he was also known as Sultan-dede, Sari Saltum, and Salih Saltum. According to the tradition, Saltuk's appearance, i.e. the construction of *türbe* and *tekkes*, took place

at the end of the 15th or in the 16th century (Hadžijahić, 2010:170). However, in the Mostar court register from 1867, a rare case of an existing historical source, explicitly mentions Saltuk's name. This can serve as a confirmation that a connection of Sari Saltuk with the *tekke* exists, moreover, his name is in the official name of the *tekke*. There were some dilemmas regarding Acik Bas and the statement that he reconstructed the *tekke* as stated in Hasandedić (1998:207-208), but this is out of the scope of this paper.

According to the written data, the *musafirhana* (guest house) was built before 1664 and then renovated in 1951, followed by several renovations after that. Somewhere at the beginning of 1949, the *türbe* and two years later the *musafirhana* were heavily damaged by rockfall. After extensive study in the summer of 1952, the National Institute for the protection of cultural monuments of the People's Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina conducted the restoration of the *türbe* and the *musafirhana*.

According to the historical data, the most extensive reconstruction works took place in 1851 by Omer-paša Latas at the request of Acik Bas. The Ottoman Empire was at its declining phase, and this was noted in all segments including the architecture. At this time the French influence was evident, incorporating the Baroque and Rococo styles in the architecture of Istanbul (Constantinople at that time) (Čelić, 1953:189-190). As Acik Bas was from Constantinople, it was no surprise that this building had the most pronounced influence of baroque style in Herzegovina. The *Musafirhana* is one of the most original residential buildings with very pronounced features that stemmed from the influence of the Baroque on Ottoman architecture. The Baroque influence is felt on the gable of the main façade, where the roof is slightly bent (Figure 7a and 8a), which is unusual for stone tiles in Herzegovina. The material which it is constructed is also unusual. This is something very special and unique for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The *Musafirhana* building has a basement in the area of 1/3 of the ground floor, ground floor, and first floor (Figure 7a). There are stone steps that are descending to the river. The lounge is extending over the river and is made of wood. The ground floor has an irregular base and consists of four rooms (Figure 7b). The walls of the rooms are orientated in the northeast direction while the northwest sides are dug into the rock. The ground floor consists of a kitchen, a big room (Figure 8b), a room and a toilet, and other spaces. It is interesting to note that the height of floors is higher in respect to what was a usual ceiling height at that time. The exact heights of the rooms on all three floors are approximately 2.9 m.

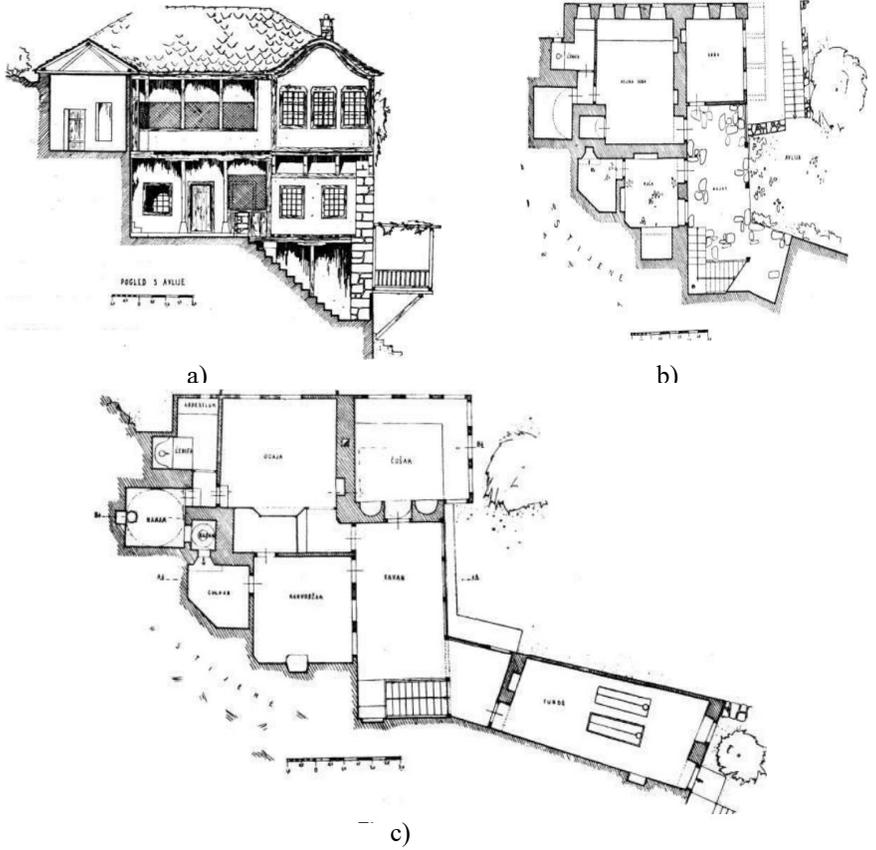


Figure 7: a) View of the building from 1950 (Čelić, 1953: 190) b) Plan of the ground (Čelić, 1953: 190), c) Plan of the first floor (Čelić, 1953: 190)



a)



b)



c)

Figure 8: a) Current view of the roof b) Room on the ground floor, c) Kitchen on the ground floor

The first floor consists of seven rooms (Figure 7c). There is the hammam which is covered with a perforated dome made of stone. Even at that time, there was a special device, which was used for heating the hammam and the water. This was done through the clay pipes that were located on the floor which were heating the water and the whole hammam (Čelić, 1953: 191). In order to make the hammam a pleasant place, the dome was covered by pieces of colored glass (Decision, 2004), as shown in Figure 9.



Figure 9: Dome covered by pieces of colored glass

The *türbe* is located on the first floor and is connected to the guest house. However, there is also a special entrance directly from the yard.

The ground floor and the basement are made of stone walls having a thickness of 60 cm. The walls of the first floor are made of *bondruck* construction (wood frame filled with brick elements) having a thickness of 25 cm. All the floors in the structure are made of wood, except the dome in the hammam which is made of stone, and a corner room (Figure 10) with a wooden richly decorated ceiling. A holly book Quran is kept open in one of the rooms (Figure 11). The *musafîrhana* and the *türbe* are covered with a gabled roof of wooden construction, and the roof is made of stone slabs (Decision, 2004).



Figure 10: Corner room on the first floor

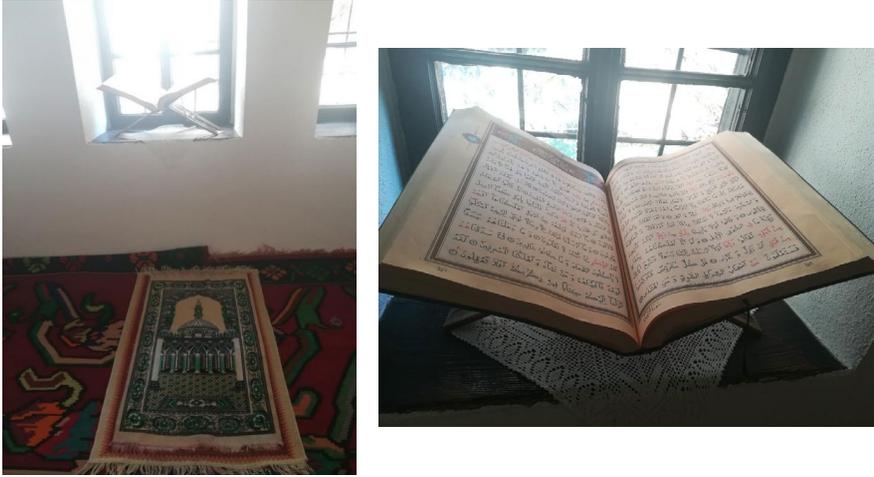


Figure 11: Holly book of Quran

The building has only two façades, southeast, and southwest, while the walls on the northeast and northwest sides are an integral part of the rock. All the walls are painted in white color, while the wood is colored brown. All the floors are made of wood except the floor in the hammam and other sanitary locations where stone slabs are placed. Wood and stone were the main materials of Bosnian-Herzegovinian architecture during the Ottoman period (Bejtić, 1983).

4. Conclusion

This paper illustrated the main characteristics and specific features of one of the most distinguished *tekke* in Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to the archeological excavations, it is believed that this was a sanctuary place even during the classic antiquity period, Early Christianity, Middle Ages, and the Ottoman period. *Tekke*, like the houses of dervishes, was erected to approach Zikr, the dove, the search for the Truth. It requires both the inner peace of the believer and a peaceful environment that allows him to distance himself from the earthly to internally questioning the individual and his being. Moving away from the world is possible only in a natural environment, and the Blagaj *tekke* has the mentioned virtues.

The specific features of this *tekke* are manifested by its specific incorporation of the Baroque and Rococo styles with the characteristic Ottoman architectural elements. The natural-architectural ensemble of the Tekke in Blagaj near Mostar has been declared a national monument by the Commission to Preserve National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Today this is one of the most visited places in Bosnia and Herzegovina by people from all over the world.

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